



MASSWILDLIFE

## DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581  
p: (508) 389-6300 | f: (508) 389-7890  
[MASS.GOV/MASSWILDLIFE](http://MASS.GOV/MASSWILDLIFE)

Jack Buckley, *Director*

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
DIVISION OF FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE  
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE BOARD  
MEETING MINUTES

PRESENT: Dr. Joseph Larson/Chair, Michael Roche/Vice Chair, Bonnie Booth/Secretary, Fred Winthrop, Dr. Brandi Van Roo, Ernest W. Foster IV, George Peterson/Commissioner/DFG, Mary-Lee King/Deputy Commissioner/DFG, Jack Buckley/Director, Mark Tisa/Deputy Director, Tom French/ Assistant Director/NHESP, Kris McCarthy/Associate Director/Finance and Administration, Michael Huguenin/Acting Assistant Director/Wildlife/Assistant Director/Operations, Todd Richards/Assistant Director/Fisheries, Marion Larson/Assistant Director/Public Affairs, Craig MacDonnell/Chief/Wildlife Lands; PUBLIC: Craig Cortis, James Nishan, Dave Morin, Ron Amidon, Mel Crouse, Elaine Thompson, Rick Cindair, Walter Bickford

DATE: January 11, 2017

LOCATION: Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Field Headquarters, Richard Cronin Building  
Westborough, Massachusetts

Chair Larson opened the January meeting of the Fisheries and Wildlife Board at 10:05 A.M.

### Acceptance of Minutes

Chair Larson noted a number of amendments to the December minutes, as follows: Page 4: In the first paragraph under Rattlesnake Working Group Report, second sentence, the Board members who had formed the Board's working group should be listed, namely, Dr. Larson, Dr. Van Roo, and Mr. Foster, and that the third sentence should read that Dr. Larson had reported that "the EEA Secretary, Commissioner Peterson, and Director Buckley had developed a [Rattlesnake Project Review] proposal before the last Board meeting, including a proposed list of study participants," and, in the third paragraph, same page and section, the second sentence should read "...that the working group had accepted the proposed list of representative people in the legislature and the Quabbin area, and recommended that that group be charged with acting as participants in a public survey process."

A motion was made by Dr. Van Roo to accept the minutes from the December 2016 meeting as amended. The motion was seconded by Secretary Booth. The motion passed unanimously.

### Chair's Comments

Chair Larson reported phone conversations with former Chair Darey, who he said was feeling more comfortable and sounded in good spirits. Dr. Larson also reported meeting with Secretary Beaton, Commissioner Peterson, and the Director about the recommendations that were accepted by the Board for the Rattlesnake Review process. The Chair thought the review plan was well received and that the Director, Commissioner, and Secretary agreed with the proposed plan. Director Buckley had then arranged a meeting in Belchertown with his staff that will support the effort, and discussed the structure of the Web page where the information will be posted, etc. He also reported that Jen Longsdorf will be the lead staff person organizing the meeting materials. Deputy Commissioner King stated that the meeting would likely be held on January 30 or 31, at 6:30 P.M., in the Athol Town Hall.

The Chair reported that he was recently approached via email by a landowner that wanted to meet with him to discuss a possible MassWildlife acquisition of a CR on a property. He reported that he declined to meet and sent a reply that went into detail about the process, dictated by a Board policy, that is followed by MassWildlife in acquisitions vis a vis the Board members. He stated that generally the process is excellent and that Board members do not actively get involved in land acquisition, rather letting the Lands Committee and the Land Agents field inquiries and pursue acquisitions.

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Chair Larson also stated that he is now both the Chair and the Board's NHESAC liaison. He reported that he has conflicts for the next NHESAC meeting, and has notified the Committee. The Chair stated he thinks the role is important but that he cannot reliably attend both meetings and participate fully in both. He added that he was looking for advice or thoughts from the Board members.

#### Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Peterson stated that Chair's comments about the MassWildlife acquisition process need to be reinforced. He affirmed that it is an excellent process that is very effective, and he commended the staff that does the work on a daily basis.

The Commissioner also reported that the FY18 budget process has started, but that he had no numbers so far and will share them as they become available. He stated that he doesn't anticipate too many problems for MassWildlife, noting that the Piping Plover money was 9-C'd, so the agency will need to find the replacement of that \$100,000.

Commissioner Peterson interrupted his comments to report that Secretary Beaton had just sent him a text message, stating that prospective Board member for the Western Wildlife District, Steve Sears, had passed the background check and will receive a letter of appointment soon, most likely being sworn in in time to join the Board at the next meeting.

The Commissioner reported that he had attended a presentation the previous day from the people who are redoing the Mass.gov Website. He stated that they seem to appreciate how people are looking for information on the Website. They did an analysis of page hits and found that five MassWildlife pages are in the state's top 10. He noted that it was very gratifying to see that MassWildlife is Number 1 in outreach and recruitment and retention.

Vice Chair Roche expressed his own admiration and appreciation for the improvements made to the MassWildlife Web page and asked the Director to pass on the Board's kudos to the staff for a great job.

#### Director's Comments

Director Buckley introduced Clerk Jenn Ford and reported that she had received the Annie Oakley Award as the top woman volunteer in the nation.

The Director reported that the bear harvest this year set a record with 286 animals harvested. He informed the Board that the members will meet the new Furbearer and Black Bear Project Leader, Dave Wattles, later in the meeting when he gave a presentation on his Moose research. Director Buckley also reported that the deer numbers are not yet ready, and will be presented to the Board at a later meeting.

He also reported that the Massachusetts Sportsmen's Council's annual meeting had been snowed out the previous Sunday, and that he would be attending the coming Sunday.

The Director reported that he was bringing Trout Unlimited into the Cronin Building on March 18 to show off our fully-staffed Fisheries Section staff, that Craig MacDonnell will give a land-acquisition presentation focused on fisheries resource conservation, and try to further engage them as cooperators on the work we're doing. Director Buckley explained that he and staff are trying to cast the big picture of fisheries conservation, adding that he is keeping the attendance to about 200 people.

The Chair asked for an update on the Resolution of the Blue Ribbon Panel. Director Buckley reported that it died at the end of the last session. He added that AFWA has hired a new full-time staff person to reissue the bill within the first hundred days of the new administration, and that initially it had about 20 cosigners. He reported that it still looks good in the new Congress, with private individuals such as Johnny Morris and energy companies in support. The Director added that the board members would find a copy of the approved SWAP in their packets, and that the SWAPs are the blueprints for Blue Ribbon panel.

Director Buckley went on to report that he was near to an agreement with WMI to provide \$77,000 per year for 4 years for a private-lands forester, further reporting that this position would complement the \$300,000 in habitat

grants from the Secretary. He stated that many applicants for the habitat grants program had said they actually need advice more than money, so he was excited that this position will fill that need.

Chair Larson asked Director Buckley for an update on the press and others interested in the proposed Trails Policy. Director Buckley reported that the Trails Policy was adopted by the Board, and that staff is in the implementation phase now, in the process of setting meetings with the major trail groups at the District level, and dispelling misconceptions about the implications of the policy. He reiterated that MassWildlife definitely welcomes the public on its lands, and that the Policy was intended to set down a marker that spells out specifically what these lands were protected for and what the acceptable uses are given the conservation values we are protecting.

The Director then presented Habitat Project Leader John Scanlon to provide an update on Birch Hill, which was requested by the Board. Mr. Scanlon reported that there are a couple thousand acres of WMA at Birch Hill, and the Army Corps has even more in the area. He stated that MassWildlife has multiple young-forest projects in the works; one on conservation-easement lands and two on fee-owned lands. Mr. Scanlon provided details for each project, including a white-pine plantation being converted and a 40-acre restoration on fee-owned lands. He reported that pre-treatment monitoring and assessment for the projects will be implemented in about a year from the present.

Vice Chair Roche complimented Mr. Scanlon, stating that he knows private individuals who want to partner and do some of the work. Secretary Booth pointed out that Ron Amidon, current president of the Worcester County League, was present, and asked if Mr. Scanlon could include Mr. Amidon in the planning and the specifics of the projects. Director Buckley gave examples of moving on a broad front to address shortages in young-forest habitat, and said anyone interested in contributing should just call him. He added that the entire project was complicated, with many moving parts, and that people interested in specific projects need to have faith and possibly be willing to work with MassWildlife at a larger scale. Deputy Director Tisa added that the agency would be advertising for the forester the following week, and that staff is doing interviews for a fire ecologist the following week.

Vice Chair Roche and Mr. Foster asked whether anything is in place for someone the clubs can contact now? Director Buckley pointed out that this was part of the reason for the new forester. Once we get the new forester, then we will have more capacity to meet that demand. Clubs and club properties are key for this reason, and are also places where people can learn to shoot safely. The clubs have the facilities, they just need to work with the agency to make them more public-friendly, including for R&R.

#### Law Enforcement Comments

Captain Tony Kabir reported that the death toll continues to rise, with 4 ORV fatalities and 15 boating fatalities. He further reported that as of the date of the meeting, OLE had three OHV and 1 snowmobile fatalities, and that it was a worrying trend.

#### The Effects of the Road Network on Moose in Massachusetts (David Wattles)

Dave Wattles, MassWildlife's Black Bear and Furbearer Biologist, presented a portion of his dissertation work with the Massachusetts Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit, analyzing the interaction of moose with the road network in Massachusetts. Mr. Wattles presented how he used correlated random walks to simulate moose movements and calculated resource selection functions to determine how the road network influenced the movements and habitat selection of GPS-collared moose in Massachusetts.

Mr. Wattles reported that the road network had a strong negative effect on both the movements and habitat selection patterns of moose. Moose crossed roads at a much lower rate than predicted and greatly reduced their habitat use near roads. Road avoidance increased with increasing disturbance intensity associated with roads, such as higher traffic volumes and times of day when traffic and human activity was greatest. He stated that the results also revealed that, due to the high-density road network in Massachusetts, wide-ranging species like moose are forced to cross roads that they would be expected to avoid in order to move about the landscape and meet their habitat requirements. Overall, roads were a major factor determining what portions of the landscape in Massachusetts moose considered suitable habitat and how they moved between habitat patches.

Mr. Wattles reported that, when extrapolated to the entire state, the models accurately predict the distribution of moose in Massachusetts and the portions of the landscape that become non-habitat due to the high density of high speed and traffic volume roads that occur there. He also gave a brief review of the patterns of moose-vehicle collisions (MVCs) in Massachusetts. MVCs occur where high-speed, high-traffic-volume roads like interstate highways and state highways bisect relatively intact blocks of forested habitat. Collisions occur on these roads at a highly disproportionate rate compared to their overall prevalence on the landscape. Mr. Wattles also stated that, due to the high density of high-speed and high-traffic-volume roads in Massachusetts, MVCs occur at a very high rate in the state, relative to the small size of the moose population. Additionally, the rate of human fatality is also very high. In conclusion, Mr. Wattles reported that his research indicates that, overall, the road network in Massachusetts negatively affects moose movements, habitat selection patterns, and survival, and determines the species' distribution in Massachusetts.

#### Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee Report

Dr. Joseph Larson reported that the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee's January meeting was scheduled for the following day, so he had no report.

#### Set Meeting Date

Members discussed dates for the February Fisheries and Wildlife Board meeting. Members selected February 22, 2014, at 10:00, at the Field Headquarters in Westborough. Members also looked ahead and scheduled the March meeting on March 22, 2017, at 10:00 A.M., at the Field Headquarters in Westborough.

#### Member's Comments

Ms. Booth reported no comment.

Mr. Winthrop thanked the Board for accommodating him the previous meetings.

Vice Chair Roche reported his excitement about Birch Hill and its potential as a bird-hunting destination for the entire state, and that it's also a great recruiting tool as an interesting, social, easy-to-start activity.

Dr. Larson commented that he's consistently seeing comments that there is plenty of young forest and that the state doesn't need more cutting, and that this notion needs to be refuted with the facts. Deputy Director Tisa added that the message needs to be continually repeated and reinforced. He stated that we are at the infancy of the new message that young-forest habitat is key for all wildlife; the science is out there and clear, and Masswildlife just needs to keep crafting the message and providing examples to the public, and not just in Massachusetts.

Dr. Van Roo reported that she received a drone for Christmas, and with more practice may be able to assist with documenting controlled burns.

Mr. Foster commented, with his thanks to all, that it was another great meeting.

A motion was made by Ms. Booth to move into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing certain land acquisitions and not to return to Regular Session. The motion was seconded by Mr. Winthrop. The motion passed unanimously.

#### Executive Session

Chief of Wildlife Lands MacDonnell presented four proposed acquisitions, which were reviewed and approved by the Board.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonnie Booth  
Secretary

List of documents presented to the Board at the January meeting

January Agenda

Draft December meeting minutes for review

Copy of letter from Chair Larson to Mr. Frederick Laskey of the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, dated January 11, 2017

“DRAFT Board Internal policy document, not for distribution outside Board Members prior to December 19 Board Meeting: Public Survey Process and Participants, Rattlesnake Restoration Project”

Spreadsheet of Natural Heritage Fund Taxpayer Donations (1992 to 2016)

Land-acquisition documentation for the Executive Session